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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the degree to which an African American verbal tradition (Black English Vernacular) survives in the writing of Black students across a generational time span. A total of 867 essays from the 1984 and the 1988/89 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were subjected to primary trait and holistic scoring analysis, and were ranked in terms of the degree of African American discourse. These scores were compared to the scores given by NAEP raters, and to scores from the 1969 and 1979 NAEP. Results indicated that: (1) no correlation existed between a discernibly African American discourse style and the production of BEV syntax, supporting results of earlier studies of 1969 and 1979 NAEP essays; (2) the more discernibly African American the discourse, the higher the primary trait and holistic scores, and the less discernibly African American the discourse, the lower the primary trait and holistic scores, contrary to earlier studies; and (3) "imaginative/narrative" essays continued to be Black students' strong suit. Findings suggest that students who employed a Black expressive discourse style received higher NAEP scores than those who did not. Recommendations for writing instructors include: capitalize on the strengths of African American cultural discourse; encourage students toward the field dependency style, which enables them to produce more powerful, meaningful, and more highly rated essays; and deemphasize concerns about BEV grammar. (Two figures listing NAEP scoring criteria, a figure listing Black English variables, and two tables of data are included; 37 references, an appendix of data, and six sample essays are attached.) (RS)

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"The Blacker the Berry, the Sweeter the Juice": African American Student Writers and the National Assessment of Educational Progress

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Introduction

Written literacy among African American students continues to be of major concern to educators, policy-makers, researchers, and the lay community. African American students have consistently scored lower than their European American counterparts in all rounds of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since its inception in 1969 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1980: Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1985). And even in that decade of remarkable progress for African American student writers, 1969-1979, where 1979 NAEP results indicated that they had improved twice as much as their white counterparts, African American students still were not writing on par with white students, as the 1979 NAEP results also indicated.

The upward surge first evidenced in 1979 continued in the 1980s though not with the same dramatic level of improvement. According to NAEP, from 1984-1988, "Black and Hispanic students appeared to show consistent improvements at all three grade levels, although the changes were not statistically significant" (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, & Jenkins, 1990, p.9). Although Black

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students' scores still do not parallel those of whites, there is some slight encouragement in NAEP's finding, particularly in light of their conclusion that generally in 1988, the Nation's students "continued to perform at minimal levels on the...writing assessment tasks, and relatively few performed at adequate or better levels" (Applebee et.al., 1990, p.6).

The topic of the African American Verbal Tradition--both its discourse modalities and its grammar--is frequently at the heart of discussion and concern about African American student writing. Of particular significance is the issue of the extent to which Black English Vernacular (BEV) patterns of syntax and discourse are reproduced in writing. A significant related issue concerns the potential correlation between a student's use of such BEV patterns and evaluation of his/her essay by writing instructors. This article addresses both issues by focusing on BEV <u>discourse</u> patterns. An earlier publication discussed these issues with a focus on BEV <u>grammar</u> (see Smitherman, 1991). Both the article presented here and the earlier article used essays written by NAEP's national representative sample of seventeen-year-old African American students from 1969 to 1988/89.

<u>National Assessment of Edicational Progress</u>

NAEP is a Federally-funded survey of the educational attainments of youth and adults at four age levels: 9, 13, 17, and 26-35. Its purpose is to measure growth or decline in educational achievement in ten subject areas: writing, reading, literature, science, mathematics, citizenship, music, art, social

studies, and career and occupational development. Administered at five and ten-year intervals since its inception in 1969, NAEP offers the advantage of a scientifically selected national representative sample, uniform scoring procedures and guidelines, a nationally administered, standardized test format, and a high degree of reliability and validity. For example, the percent of exact agreement on the rating of the 1984 papers from 17-year-olds ranged from 89% to 92%, with corresponding reliability coefficients of .89 and .91 (Applebee, Langer & Mullis, 1985, p. 68). The writing task time is fifteen or sixteen minutes, depending on the task, and students submit first drafts. Previously administered by the Education Commission of the States, NAEP has been under the purview of Educational Testing Service since 1984.

The students assessed reflect national, representative groups, in a random sample, stratified by race/ethnicity, social-educational class, region of country, urban/rural, gender, and other demographics. In 1969-79, approximately 8,100 students were assessed. In 1984-88, approximately 18,000 students were assessed.

NAEP's essay tasks represent three types of rhetorical modalities: (a) imaginative/narrative; (b) descriptive/ informative; and (c) persuasive. For the <u>imaginative</u> modality, in the 1969 and 1979 NAEP, students were given a picture of a stork and told to make up a story about it. The prompt was comprised of three possible opening lines: (a) "I'm telling you,

Henry, if you don't get rid of that thing, it's going to eat up the cat!"; (b) "But mother, I am telling the truth! It laid an egg in the Chevy."; and (c) "Last night a very odd-looking bird appeared in the neighborhood." In 1984, students were given a picture of a box with a hole in it and an eye peering out. They were told to "imagine" themselves in the picture, to describe the scene and their feelings about it and to make their descriptions "lively and interesting." There was no imaginative task in 1988.

For the descriptive/informative task, the 1969 and 1979 students were asked to describe something they knew about, a familiar place or thing, in such a way that it could be recognized by someone reading the description. For 1984 and 1988, they were given the topic "Food on the Frontier" and asked to write an essay discussing reasons for the differences between food on the frontier and food today. Finally, for the persuasive modality, in 1984 and 1988, the students' task was to write a letter to the recreation department in their city or town trying to convince the head of that department to buy either an abandoned railroad track or an old warehouse to create recreational opportunities. (We were unable to obtain the persuasive essays for 1969 and 1979; thus this longitudinal comparison was not possible.)

Issues in the Study

As a womanist linguist concerned about the educational plight of African American youth, I began this line of research in 1981, building on my dissertation research comparing the

speech and writing of Black students (Smitherman, 1969). My study was one of the first to examine the "dialect interference" hypothesis, the notion that spoken language by Blacks is a source of interference in their production of written Standard English. Analyzing oral and written samples from a group of African American junior high students for use of BEV syntactical patterns, the study concluded that while both speech and writing exhibited features of BEV, there was significantly more BEV grammar in speech than in writing. Subsequent work by researchers such as Whiteman (1976), Scott (1981), Wright (1984), Chaplin (1987), and my own earlier work on NAEP (1983; 1985) raised issues concerning comparisons of African and European American student writers, methodological concerns about differential topics, audiences, and task conditions for speech and writing, the importance of BEV discourse over BEV syntax in writing, and the relationship between the "students' right to their own language" and teacher ratings of student writing. The following crucial questions are examined in the research presented here:

1. Can Black student writing be characterized by an identifiable discourse style rooted in the African American Verbal Tradition?
2. If so, does use of this discourse style correlate with use of patterns of BEV grammar?
3. What effect, if any, does use of an African American discourse style have on teacher ratings of Black student

writing?

4. Given writing with both BEV discourse and BEV grammar, does one dimension have greater effect on teacher ratings than the other?

Some responses to these questions emerged from the research of Scott (1981) and Chaplin (1987). Scott controlled for the methodological shortcomings in earlier studies (e.g., unequivalent topics, modalities, and audiences) by using African American college freshmen's speeches and essays on identical topics, produced under identical conditions. The essays were edited by freshman composition instructors for BEV, mechanics, spelling, and punctuation. Scott then asked the writing instructors to evaluate edited and unedited versions of the students' essays. When she compared the ratings of edited essays to ratings of corresponding unedited essays, no significant difference was found. Scott concluded that other factors, such as discourse patterns, were probably influencing the ratings.

Chaplin utilized 1984 NAEP essays for her work. (Hers is believed to be the only other research on African American student writing in NAEP.) She compared African and European American 8th and 9th grade students in NAEP and African American students in the 1986 New Jersey High School Proficiency Test in an attempt to identify discourse patterns differentiating Black and white students. She focused on the construct of field dependency-independency, that is, the thinker's/writer's relationship to the event, idea, phenomenon or "field" under

discussion. The field dependent thinker's/writer's style demands involvement with and a lack of distancing from the phenomenon being studied, analyzed, or communicated about. There is a tendency to see things whole, rather than segmented. The field independent thinker's/writer's style demands distance from and a lack of involvement with the field. There is a tendency to view things in parts or segments.

African American psychologists have long theorized that African Americans employ a field dependent style and European Americans a field independent style (e.g., Wilson, 1971; Williams, 1972; Simpkins, 1976). Cooper (1979) did the pioneering research on linguistic correlates of field dependency, bringing together the insights of African American psychologists and communication scholars. While the notion of differing cognitive styles, varied along racial/cultural lines, has caused controversy, it is imperative to understand that we are not talking about cognitive style in the "genetic inferiority" sense used by Bereiter and Engleman (1966), or Jensen (1980). Rather field dependency-independency emanates from different cultural orientations and world views, a view in concert with the theoretical frameworks of Humboldt (1841), Sapir (1929), Voloshinov (1930), Whorf (1956), Vygotsky (1962), and more recently, Hymes (1974). It can be argued that we may not sufficiently understand the exact nature of the field dependency-independency constructs, yet a great deal of research substantiates that these constructs are relaible indicators of

differing cultural experiences and cosmologies. Critically, and futuristically as U.S. society becomes increasingly diverse, we must arrive at a genuine acceptance of the fact that difference does not mean deficiency.

Chaplin used Black and white teacher raters to assess the African and European American students' use of field dependency-independency as a discourse style in their essays. Her analysis led to the following observation: "....for more of the Black than White student writers, there was an identifiable field dependent style" (Chaplin, 1987, p.26). Without being given an imposed structure, or racial identification of the student writers, Chaplin's readers identified two discourse features in the Black student writing that marked field dependency: cultural vocabulary/influence and conversational tone. According to Chaplin, cultural vocabulary/influence represented culture-specific words, idioms and phrases, the language that has "helped them to shape reality" and thus "become a part of their writing" (Chaplin, 1987, p.48) Conversational tone she defined as producing an essay that reads like "recorded oral language or a conversation" (Chaplin, 1987, p.37). Although Chaplin states that there were more similarities than differences in the Black and white students' writing, she does conclude that "conversational tone, cultural vocabulary and Black Vernacular English were used more often by Black...students" (1990, p. 18). In terms of implications for writing instruction, she advises that since "Black students...seemed... less able to distance

themselves from cultural influences," such instruction "should be conceived within the context of an understanding and appreciation of the Black experience" if we are to "maximize the potential that Black students have for writing development" (1990, p.21). Chaplin's work has buttressed my own claims about a discernible African American discourse style of writing which I began to explore in analyzing the 1969 and 1979 NAEP essays. Those explorations were extended and developed, and the use of a Black discourse style became the focal point in the present study.

Sample and Methods

In developing the methodology for this study, I felt it critical to compare African American student writers to one another, rather than to European American student writers. The research literature is quite definitive about the existence of an African American Verbal Tradition, with varying degrees of survival within the race (see, e.g., Herskovits, 1940; Dillard, 1972; Lincoln, 1990; Thompson, 1983; Labov, 1972; Asante, 1990; Smitherman, 1977; Gates, 1988). Our focus here was to analyze the degree to which this tradition survives in the writing of Black students across a generational time span, rather than to assess the degree of borrowing from this tradition by European American students. Further, although Black students are often disproportionately represented in "basic" writing courses, I felt it imperative to analyze a variety of Black student writers, not just those deemed "basic" or "remedial." Since there is

diversity of performance within race, writing norms can be derived from African American student performance.

In our study of 1969 and 1979 NAEP essays, we analyzed Black discourse using holistic scoring for field dependency. The discourse analysis involved only the sample of narrative/ imaginative essays and employed general, impressionistic ratings of field involvement by a social psychologist, a graduate student in English, and me. We rated the essays holistically using a "field involvement score," based on the rater's assessment of the degree of distance of the writer from his/her subject matter. Some of the stylistic-linguistic features this measurement involved were: the presence of interaction between the writer and others; dialogue in the essay that clearly involved the writer; the attribution of human qualities to non-human things; other signals that the writer was in the environment of the communication context he/she created.

For the present work, utilizing 1984 and 1988/89 NAEP essays, we extended and refined that earlier methodology. Several writing instructors experienced in teaching African American students and one other sociolinguist, who specializes in Black English Vernacular studies, worked with me to construct a model of African American discourse to use in analyzing the essays. First, all became conversant with work on field dependency-independency, including Cooper's and Chaplin's studies and my 1985 NAEP study. Then each instructor independently read the same 25 essays, noting any features that struck him/her as

discernibly African American. Next the group came together to discuss and compare our lists. We repeated this same procedure twice, thus ending up with a model based on independent assessment, discussion, and 85% agreement about the Black discourse features in 75 essays in the NAEP sample. Each time we came together for discussion, we found ourselves coming up with similar concepts, different labels and terminology to be sure, but essentially the same characteristic conceptual features. We established the following set of criteria for African American discourse in Black student writing:

1. Rhythmic, dramatic, evocative language

Example: "Darkness is like a cage in black around me, shutting me off from the rest of the world."

2. Reference to color/race/ethnicity [i.e., when topic doesn't call for it]

Example: "I dont get in trouble at school or have any problems with people picking on me I am nice to every one no matter what color or sex."

3. Use of proverbs, aphorisms, Bibical verses

Example: "People might have shut me off from the world cause of a mistake, crime, or a sin....Judge not others, for you to will have your day to be judge"

4. Sermonic tone, reminiscent of traditional Black Church rhetoric, especially in vocabulary, imagery, metaphor

Example: "I feel like I'm suffering from being with world. There no lights, food, water, bed and clothes for me to put

on. Im fighten, scared of what might happened if no one finds me. But I pray and pray until they do find me."

5. Direct address/conversational tone

Example: "I think you should use the money for the railroad track....it could fall off the tracks and kill someone on the train And that is very dangerius. Dont you think so. Please change your mind and pick the railroad tracks. For the People safelty O.K." [From letter writing, persuasive task]

6. Cultural references

Example: "How about slipping me some chitterlings in tonite"

7. Ethnolinguistic idioms

Example: "....a fight has broke loose"; "It would run me crazy...."

8. Verbal inventiveness, unique nomenclature

Example: "[The settlers] were pioneerific"; "[The box] has an eye look-out"

9. Cultural values/community consciousness

Expressions of concern for development of African Americans; concern for welfare of entire community, not just individuals, as for example, several essays in which students expressed the view that recreational facilities would have to be for everybody, "young and old, and the homeless among Blacks"

10. Field dependency

Involvement with and immersion in events and situations; personalizing phenomena; lack of distance from topics and subjects.

The research team used holistic scoring to rank each essay in terms of the degree of African American discourse in the essay. We used a 4-point Likert type scale, from 1 ("highly discernible African American style) to 4 ("not discernible African American style"). Each of the 1984 Imaginative essays (N= 432), and a subsample (N = 435) of the 1984 and 1988 Persuasive essays was coded, independently, by two members of our research team. In the case of a discrepancy in coding, a third member coded the essay. The total number of essays coded was 867. In the case of 780 of the essays, or in 90% of the discourse sample, the two raters agreed, independently, on the discourse score assigned to the essay.

Each of the essays had also been given a primary trait and/or a holistic score by NAEP teacher--raters trained and experienced in holistic scoring and general writing assessment. A holistic score is an assessment of overall writing competency, what NAEP describes as "a global view of the ideas, language facility, organization, mechanics, and syntax of each paper taken as whole" (Applebee et.al., 1990, p.84). Further, with holistic scoring, papers are evaluated relative to one another, rather than against specific criteria, as is the case with primary trait scoring. In 1969 and 1979, NAEP raters utilized a 4-point scale for both types of scoring. In 1984 and 1988, NAEP raters

utilized a 6-point scale for holistic and a 4-point scale for primary trait scoring.

In primary trait assessment, papers are evaluated according to features of specific writing tasks. This score reflects the measure of student success in accomplishing the assigned purpose of the writing (Applebee et.al, 1990, p.6). Here matters of mechanics, grammar, and syntax are subordinated to fluency and execution of the writing task. (See Figures 1 and 2 for sample scales.)

Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

For analysis, our team's discourse scores and NAEP's rater scores were compared to ascertain the degree of correlation, if any, between use of an African American discourse style and the primary trait and holistic scores assigned to an essay by raters.

Next, the discourse scores were analyzed to examine the correlation, if any, between the production of BEV syntax and the use of a Black oral discourse style. BEV syntax was measured by the percentage of realization of patterns established in the literature as BEV grammatical patterns. (See Figure 3 for these variables with examples from the NAEP essays.)

Insert Figure 3 about here

The Pearson statistical procedure was utilized for the

correlational analysis, with .05 established as the level of significance.

Results

Let us begin with a summary of the findings relative to discourse analysis and primary trait and holistic scores in NAEP 1969 and 1979. Analysis indicated that

1. there was no statistically significant decline in field dependency from 1969 to 1979. This finding contrasted with the significant decline in BEV syntax in the narrative mode over the decade (Smitherman, 1983; see also Appendix A);
2. there was no correlation between use of BEV syntax and field dependency, i.e., high users of BEV syntax do not necessarily use field dependent style, nor are those writers who use low BEV syntax predictably field independent; and
3. there was no correlation between rater score and field dependency. By contrast, BEV syntax correlated significantly and negatively with rater score for both primary trait and holistic scoring; even when all variables (sex, year, essay type, field dependency score) were factored into the equation, BEV syntax remained the most significant predictor of rater score.

Next, we turn to the 1984 and 1988 results of discourse analysis, BEV syntax, and rater scores. As detailed above, our present NAEP study utilized a fully developed explicit set of criteria for identifying varying degrees of Black discourse in the 1984 Imaginative essays and the 1984 and 1988/89 Persuasive

essays. Correlations were run between: (a) the discourse score and BEV syntax; and (b) the discourse score and holistic and primary trait scores.

In the case of the first relationship, results tend to support the tendency we observed in 1969 and 1979, namely that BEV syntax and BEV discourse are not co-occurring variables. No correlation was found between a discernibly African American discourse style and the production of BEV syntax. In fact, of the three sets of essay data subjected to discourse analysis, correlations were found between BEV grammar and non-African American discourse style. Although only one of these analyses reached statistical significance, it is interesting to note that the correlations are all positive. That is, when overall BEV syntax was high, the discourse scores tended to be high also. A high discourse score on our rating scale indicated an essay that did not have a discernibly African American discourse style, thus suggesting that the production of BEV grammar goes up as the writing becomes less "Black" rhetorically. Although we must propose this as an observed trend, not a conclusion (see Table 1), it is interesting to note that this observation coincides with that of researchers who posit that "talking Black" does not have to encompass features of BEV grammar (e.g, Taylor, 1992; Hoover 1978; Smitherman, 1977).

Insert Table 1 about here

Turning to the second possible relationship, between discourse score and holistic and primary trait scores, results for 1984 and 1988/89 were highly significant, in contrast to the 1969 and 1979 findings. In the 1980's the more discernibly African American the discourse, the higher the primary trait and holistic scores; the less discernibly African American the discourse, the lower the primary trait and holistic scores. This finding was statistically significant for all three data sets and for both holistic and primary trait scoring. (See Table 2.) What the negative correlations in Table 2 indicate is that the higher the discourse score, the lower the rater's score. As mentioned, a high discourse score indicates an essay written in a non-African American discourse style. As it turns out, these essays were assigned lower rater scores, whether assessed using primary trait or holistic scoring criteria. This finding held regardless of the degree of BEV grammar in a given essay, at least with primary trait scoring.

Insert Table 2 about here

As an illustration of this finding, note the opening sentences in the two essays below. The writers are responding to NAEP's 1984 Imaginative essay prompt, a picture of a box with a hole in it and an eye looking out, requiring the writers to "imagine" themselves in the picture and to describe the scene and their feelings in a "lively and interesting" way. Essay 582200

begins this way (see Appendix B for entire essay):

> Well, a boy is in a box outside, may be in his or her back and looking through a square hole. He or she look like hear she is hiding from someone. maybe he or she is 5 year old and some one is trying to find him/her to beat him or her up.

In terms of its degree of African American discourse, we rated this essay a "4," i.e., distinctly non-Black style. NAEP raters gave the essay a primary trait score of "1," and a holistic score of "2," both low scores. By contrast, Essay 590877 begins this way (refer to Appendix B for entire essay):

> I see little kids playing around some on the swings, and some on the sliding bord. The kids are enjoying themselfs. As for me I'm in this box because I'm afraid of all of the other kids in the park.

We gave this essay a Black discourse score of "1," i.e., distinctly Black style. NAEP raters gave the essay a primary trait score of "3," and a holistic score of "5," both high scores.

Now, clearly both of the above essays begin with departures from Edited American English. Yet the latter essay exhibits greater fluency and power, and it's clear that this writer is on her/his way somewhere towards a product that will be rhetorically effective. In sum, what our analysis of essays by several hundred African American student writers indicates is this: given a paper with both BEV grammar and BEV discourse, the greater the

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degree of Black discourse, irrespective of the degree/amount of BEV grammar, the higher will be the rating in primary trait scoring, that is, scoring for fluency/accomplishment of the rhetorical task.

Finally, the Imaginative/Narrative continues to be Black students' strong suit. These essays were consistently assessed higher by NAEP raters than the 1984 or 1988 Persuasives. Further, the Imaginatives also exhibited higher levels of African American Verbal Tradition style as indicated by the fact that greater numbers of these essays received discourse scores of 1 or 2 by our research team than was the case with our discourse rating of Persuasives.

Conclusions and Implications

The title of this article contains an age-old Black proverb, the message of which speaks to the power of Blackness in skin color, rhetorical fluency, and cultural affinity. For 1984 Imaginative and 1984 and 1988 Persuasive NAEP essays, a team of experienced writing instructors was able to identify a discernible Black discourse style and establish criteria for rating the "Blackness" of student essays. The team achieved a 90% agreement for nearly 1,000 essays. Results indicated that students who employed a Black expressive discourse style received higher NAEP scores than those who did not. In the case of primary trait scores, this finding held regardless of the frequency of BEV syntax (fairly low, anyway, and continuing to decline over time--see Appendix A and Smitherman, 1991).

There are several clear implications here for writing instructors and others concerned about African American students' written literacy. First, capitalize on the strengths of African American cultural discourse; it's a rich reservoir which students can and should tap. Secondly, encourage students toward the field dependency style, which enables them to produce more powerful, meaningful, and more highly rated essays. Third design strategies for incorporating the Black imaginative, story-telling style into student production of other essay modalities. Fourth, de-emphasize your and your students' concerns about BEV grammar; over concentration on these forms frequently suppresses the production of African American discourse and its rich, expressive style.

As cultural norms shift focus from "book" English to "human" English, the narrativizing, dynamic quality of the African American Verbal Tradition will help students produce lively, image-filled, concrete, readable essays, regardless of rhetorical modality--persuasive, informative, comparison/contrast, etc. I am often asked "how far" does the teacher go with this kind of writing pedagogy. My answer: as far as you can. Once you have pushed your students to rewrite, revise; rewrite, revise; rewrite, revise; and once they have produced the most powerful essay possible, then and only then should you have them turn their attention to BEV grammar, and matters of punctuation, spelling, and mechanics.

Finally, if you are worried about preparing your students

for the next level ("Well, that might be okay in my classroom, but then what about when they pass onto Mrs. X's class...."), consider the NAEP results reported here from the perspective of the teacher-raters of the 1980s and beyond. They contrast sharply with those teacher-raters in the 1969 and 1979 NAEP where African American discourse style had no effect on rater scores. The fact that rater scores in 1984 and 1988 positively correlated with Black discourse styles speaks favorably for the social and educational efforts of groups such as the Center for Applied Linguistics, NCTE, CCCC, and others, who, over the past twenty years, have worked to sensitize teachers to the linguistic-cultural norms of the African American speech community. There now appears to be a receptivity to, subliminal awareness of, and in some quarters, even conscious celebration of the rhetorical power of the African American Verbal Tradition. Public schools and college teachers, too, now appear to understand that "the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice."

FIGURE 1

NAEP PRIMARY TRAIT SCALE

Score	
4	**Elaborated.** Students providing elaborated responses went beyond the essential, reflecting a higher level of coherence and providing more detail to support the points made.
3	**Adequate.** Students providing adequate responses included the information and ideas necessary to accomplish the underlying task and were considered likely to be effective in achieving the desired purpose.
2	**Minimal.** Students writing at the minimal level recognized some or all of the elements needed to complete the task but did not manage these elements well enough to assure that the purpose of the task would be achieved.
1	**Unsatisfactory.** Students who wrote papers judged as unsatisfactory provided very abbreviated, circular, or disjointed responses that did not even begin to address the writing task.
0	**Not Rated.** A small percentage of the responses were blank, indecipherable, or completely off task, or contained a statement to the effect that the student did not know how to do the task; these responses were not rated.

FIGURE 2

NAEP HOLISTIC SCALE (IMAGINATIVE ESSAY MODALITY)

Score

6 A 6 story demonstrates a high degree of competence [appropriate for grade level] in response to the prompt but may have a few minor errors.

A story in this category generally has the following features:

o is well developed with a clear narrative structure

o contains considerable detail that enriches the narrative

o clearly demonstrates facility in the use of language

o is generally free from errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

5 A 5 story demonstrates clear competence in response to the prompt but may have minor errors.

A story in this category generally has the following features:

o is developed with a clear narrative structure

o contains details that contribute effectively to the narrative

o demonstrates facility in the use of language

o contains few errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

4 A 4 story demonstrates competence in response to the prompt.

A story in this category generally has the following features:

o is adequately developed but may have occasional weaknesses in narrative structure

o contains details that contribute to the narrative

o demonstrates adequate facility in the use of language

o may display some errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure but not a consistent pattern or accumulation of

such errors

3 A 3 story demonstrates some degree of competence in response to the prompt but is clearly flawed.

A story in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

- o is somewhat developed but lacks clear narrative structure
- o contains few details that contribute to the narrative
- o demonstrates inappropriate use of language
- o reveals a pattern or accumulation of errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure

2 A 2 story demonstrates only limited competence and is seriously flawed.

A story in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

- o lacks development and/or narrative structure
- o contains little or no relevant detail
- o displays serious or persistent errors in use of language
- o displays serious errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure

1 A 1 story demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in writing skills.

A story in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

- o is undeveloped
- o is incoherent
- o contains serious and persistent writing errors

FIGURE 3

BLACK ENGLISH VARIABLES

VARIABLE	EXAMPLE FROM NAEP ESSAY
ED MORPHEME:	
Main-Verb Past (MV + Ø)	Frontier use corn and meat for there basic food.
Main-Verb-Perfect (Have/Had + MV + Ø)	They have work hard...to keep the crops growing good to eat.
Verbal Adjective (V + Ø)	I am writing because I am concern of the recreational project...in our town.
Passive (Be + MV + Ø) with	I am lock in an apartment darkness looking through this little hole.
S MORPHEME:	
Noun-Plural (N + Ø pl)	Pioneers didn't have such thing...to keep their foods.
Noun-Possessive (N + Ø poss)	Today way is...easier.
Third Person-Singular (V + Ø) do	But our environment of today have refrigeration and things ...can be stored.
HYPERCORRECTION (N pl + s)	But today peoples are able to get refrigeraters and food still spoil.
COPULA:	
Be + Main Verb (Ø + MV)	I feel like someone_____watching me throwing at me.
Be + Noun (Ø + N)	He___a real good citizen.
Be + Adjective (Ø + Adj)	I think it___great to have

some

place to play.

Be + Preposition (Ø + Prep)

I feel really good about what _____ around me

Be + Adverb (Ø + Adj)

But it out door.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT-PRESENT car.
(Subj pl + is)

a bird and egg is in that

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT-PAST
(Subj pl + was)

The pioneers then was no different than what we do today.

PERFECTIVE DONE/HAVE
allready
(0 have/has/had + MV)
for

...the food to mostley

____ been cooked and caned

you...

IRREGULAR VERBS:

~~of~~ e

But back then they eat a lot of

health food.

So I have gave my opinions about what I think you should do.

MULTIPLE NEGATION

Last night there was a straight-looking new bird in the neighborhood no one never seen before nowhere.

IT EXPLETIVE
(it + V + N)

It is a lot different things that would brighten up our community.

UNDIFFERENTIATED THIRD-PERSON PLURAL PRONOUN

the

...soon are later they will quiet that job because they will have alot of money in

bank for they family and they self.

PRONOMINAL APPOSITION
(N Subj + P subj)

People in the old day they do not have refrigeration...

TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN BEV SYNTAX AND DISCOURSE STYLE, 1984 AND 1988

ESSAY YEAR & TYPE	R-VALUE	P-VALUE
1984 Imaginative	.0361	.45*
1984 Persuasive	.1436	.05**
1984 Persuasive	.0044	.95*

* = Not statistically significant

** = Statistically significant at .05 or less

TABLE 2

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN BEV DISCOURSE AND HOLISTIC AND PRIMARY TRAIT SCORES, 1984 AND 1988

ESSAY YEAR & TYPE	SCORING METHOD	R-VALUE	P-VALUE
1984 Imaginative*	P	-.1660	.001**
	H	-.1783	.000**
1984 Persuasive	H	-.3260	.009**
1988 Persuasive	P	-.1967	.002**
	H	-.3924	.000**

P = Primary Trait

H = Holistic

* = Imaginative task not given in 1988

** = Statistically significant at .05 or lower

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APPENDIX A: OVERALL BEV SCORE, 1969 - 1988/89

1969 - 1979

ESSAY TYPE	YEAR	BEV MEAN
Imaginative	1969	.11
Imaginative	1979	.09*
Informative	1969	.10
Informative	1979	.14**
Persuasive	Not Available	Not Available

1984 - 1988/89

ESSAY TYPE	YEAR	BEV MEAN
Imaginative	1984	.11
	Not Given in 1988	
Informative	1984	.10
Informative	1988	.06**
Persuasive	1984	.09
Persuasive	1988	.05**

* = Not statistically significant
** = Statistically significant at .05 or lower

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE ESSAYS

Imaginative, 1969 53

I am a sad sad bird. Nobody wants me because I am so wierd-looking. But some day just like the Negro they will realize that I am something. May be I do have a long beck. They shouldn't juge me that way. I might look dumb to them but Ihave some sense. They just wont give me change to show it. They just left me out here all by myself. They don't relize. that I'm blood and skin. I'm just as good as any other bird.

Field dependent essay, discernibly Black style; NAEP rater score (2),low score

Imaginative, 1979 148

Last night a very odd-looking bird appeared in the neighborhood. Then suddenly upon seeing this odd-looking bird a kaos arose before serveral families. This was one of the biggest controversies in several years due to the fact that this town almost became a ghost town. It came to be that the appearance of this bird in the town was a runaway from the California state zoo. And their authorities had come to search for this bird and was offering a reward well over the town's income for a whole year. This incident was news making in more than thirty-eight states thoughtout the country. The reason the odd bird's valuability was that it was theonly of its kind left in existence. And it was carrying youn'g ready for a full life in a matter of two to three weeks. Nevertheless money to those authorities who were searching for this odd looking bird, was no object. Although the bird wich was last seen in the small village was not found there, the town's fame and popularity rose to everyone. The town was far away from being a ghost town.

Field independent essay, not a discernibly Black style; NAEP rater score (3), high score

Imaginative, 1984 582200

Well, a boy is in a box outside, may be in his or her back and loking through a square hole. He or she look like hear she is hiding from someone. Maybe he or she is 5 year old and some one is trying to find him/her to beat him or her up. There for a hour the person in the box stay there and it is getting dark. The person looking for the kid in the box knows where the kid is a waiting for that person to come out.

NAEP primary trait score (1), holistic score (2), both low; Discourse score (4), not discernible Black style

Imaginative, 1984 590877

I see little kids playing around me some on the swings, and some on the sliding bord. The kids are enjoying themselfs. As for me I'm in this box because I'm afraid of all of the other kids in the park. In a distinance I see a baseball field and some men playing and over by the park is a Basketball court where other kids are playing. And in the picnic grounds theirs a family having a picnic. The kids are playing catch with their father while the mother I think is setting up the picnic area. In another section of the park theirs a crowd of people watching these two guys "break" dancing. "Break" dancing is a new form of dance combining some gymnistics with some regular dance moves. It is a real sight to see. Also I see some girls on the sidewalk jumping rope double dutch style thats when you use two ropes. The girls are very good
to. It is a hot day so I see that the swimming pool is doing good today. I would be over their myself If I wasn't shy. It's a very hot in this box but I'm so afraid to come out. I see that a fight has broke loose by the swings. Two little kids are fighting over one see all the other kids have already taken all the other swings and their two kids and only one swing left. I think that the kids have settled their argument now.

Now here comes a big black man over by me now. He says that my mother is here to pick me up so I could go home By.

NAEP primary trait score (3), holistic score (5), both high; Discourse score (1), highly discernible African American style

Persuasive, 1984 050238

I think that If the ABandoned RailRoad track was not there. that we can use the money that we have saved could go on the things we need for the community center. So that the children can have many & more things to do. The RailRoad could Be destroyed so that they can make a play ground out of It. And the ware house could have some toys In It Also Just in case It get cold or Rain. Therefore they could have toys Inside and outside.

NAEP holistic score (2), low score; Discourse score (4), not discernible Black style

Persuasive, 1988 520462

How are you doing? Fine I hope!

I'm writing you this letter in reference to you making your purchase in buying the warehouse.

I think that in buying the old warehouse, we could paint it and fix it up and make it out of a gym for the kids during the week and on weekends and on Fridays we could have Bingo and maybe once or twice a month on Sundays we could give a super.

During the week we could have the children come here after school and do their homework and then let them play a little basketball, until about 5:30 p.m.

On Fridays at about 7:00 we could set up for Bingo and sell the cards 8 for $10 and that way we could help pay for the pot and have 14 games and cherry betts.

Every first or last Sunday in the month we could give a super for the community and sell each plate for $3 to $5.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 288-8263.

Sincerly,
Ms. Zenitta

NAEP holistic score (4), high score; Discourse score (1), highly discernible Black style